



*"Men and nature must work hand in hand. The throwing out of balance of the resources of nature throws out of balance also the lives of men."*

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt

George Bird Grinnell, editor of the magazine "Forest and Stream," formed the country's first bird preservation organization, the "Audubon Society," in the 1880's. Wealthy outdoor sports enthusiasts and visionary conservationists joined forces at the turn of the century to form the "Boone and Crockett" Club to ensure big game species were not hunted to extinction. The wildlife preservation debate continued this century. For example, former Interior biologist Rachel Carson bravely sounded the clarion call and warned the country of severe wildlife damages caused by the use of pesticides. The debate continues today.

To maintain the proper balance between our need to protect key natural resources and yet provide for the Nation's economic development needs, the Department proposes increases of over \$100 million to expand and improve efforts to conserve, protect, and enhance fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Department also proposes to continue ongoing efforts with the California Bay-Delta, the Everglades, and the Forest Plan.

Central to this initiative are several landscape-wide projects. The Department will ensure the health of Federal lands and the economic vitality of communities

in the Columbia River Basin, upper Klamath Basin, and northern Great Basin that lie east of the Cascade range. The Department will also implement a new Southwest Conservation Strategy — centered on watershed restoration — to alleviate emerging wildlife and development issues. In addition, the Department will expand the fuels management fire initiative proposed in the 1998 budget. Highlights of this effort follow.

## **ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT REFORM**

The budget includes an increase of \$38.8 million to more efficiently and effectively implement the Administration's reforms of the Endangered Species Act and position the FWS to comply with the initial needs of a reauthorized Endangered Species Act, should that happen.

The additional funding will be used, for instance, to develop and implement up to twenty additional candidate conservation agreements to keep species off the threatened and endangered lists. Candidate conservation is an effective means of conserving species and habitats, and may preclude the need to list a species if its decline is recognized early and agreements that remove threats are implemented. For example, the



Devil's River minnow in Texas could be kept off the list with a successful candidate conservation agreement.

Habitat Conservation Plans allow economic development to proceed while at the same time protecting species. During 1998, HCPs covering approximately 7.3 million acres will be implemented or under development; the 1999 funding increase will support the development or implementation of an additional 100 HCPs. Sponsors of recent successful HCPs include: timber companies in Alabama for the Redhills salamander; Brevard County, the State of Florida, and other partners for the Florida Scrub Jay; and San Diego County, California for more than 80 listed, proposed, candidate, and other species of concern.

Safe Harbor agreements are negotiated with private landowners to encourage them to enhance or improve habitat for endangered species on their property while providing assurances that additional restrictions will not be imposed as a result of their voluntary conservation actions to benefit covered species. The budget includes a funding increase in the recovery program to support approximately 150 Safe Harbor Agreements that will be in some stage of development or implementation in 1999. Most of the landowners who have participated in Safe Harbor agreements are either corporations or wealthy individual owners who can afford to voluntarily

set aside significant habitat for protection. To further support the development of these innovative agreements and encourage small landowners with an incentive to participate in these agreements, the Department proposes a \$5.0 million increase for a pilot Safe Harbor grant program for small landowners. Federal assistance for smaller landowners will provide an incentive to conserve important habitat for endangered species.

The budget also includes an increase of \$3.0 million — or 50 percent — for Section 6 Habitat Conservation Plan land acquisition grants. The pilot program was inaugurated in 1997 with \$6.0 million which has been allocated to six projects including the Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan in western Travis County Texas to protect the golden-cheeked warbler and 34 other listed and candidate species as well as the San Diego Multispecies Conservation Plan to conserve habitat for 85 rare plants and animals. Preliminary funding requests for 1998 are currently being considered; and the 1999 increase recognizes the growing demand for funding assistance.

## **BIA ENDANGERED SPECIES**

A \$1.0 million program increase for the BIA will allow 30 Tribes to conduct surveys and inventories on 100,000 acres of habitat; implement habitat improvement programs on an estimated 500 acres; engage in collaborative, proactive species protection and recovery efforts with Federal agencies; and provide additional training to natural resource management personnel. BIA estimates that 30 listed species would directly benefit from BIA's strengthened commitment. The BIA is the steward of nearly 56 million acres of trust lands, which are home to more than 100 federally listed threatened and endangered plants and animals.

## **NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM OPERATIONS**

As part of this overall effort, the budget includes an operations increase of \$15.0 million or eight percent to address the highest priority operations needs in the National Wildlife Refuge system to protect wildlife, improve habitat, and offer wildlife related opportunities to the public. Together with the \$10.9 million increase for refuge maintenance discussed above, this additional funding will enhance the NWR system which is the sole Federal land system dedicated to wildlife, comprising 512 refuges and 38 wetland management districts totalling 93 million acres.

SPECIES and HABITAT INCREASES (dollars in millions)	
	1999 Increases
Endangered Species Reform (FWS) .....	38.8
BIA endangered species program .....	1.0
National Wildlife Refuges .....	15.0
FWS operations programs .....	8.8
BLM landscape projects .....	13.9
Prescribed fire .....	14.4
USGS natural resource science .....	11.0

The recently enacted National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 clearly defines the mission of the system “to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.” This additional funding will pay for 223 new projects at 152 refuges. These projects have been prioritized through the operating needs system and tied to specific performance goals through outcomes. These projects will restore or improve some 54,000 acres, serve 1.1 million new visitors, and improve biological capabilities within the system.

**FISHERIES FLOWS AND PASSAGES**

Additional FWS programmatic increases total \$8.8 million to support numerous wildlife and fisheries projects. Of note are increases to improve flows and passages for spawning fisheries. Two recent landmark events have ushered in a historic new era in fisheries restoration nationwide: the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission order to remove the Edwards Dam on Maine’s Kennebec River and the actual voluntary demolition of the Quaker Dam on North Carolina’s Neuse River. Eventual removal of the Edwards Dam will restore Atlantic salmon, shad and shortnose sturgeon to 17 miles of the Kennebec River which have been blocked to these anadromous species since 1837. Removal of the Quaker Dam will improve habitat for American shad and striped bass along 75 miles of the Neuse River and replenish 925 miles of tributary spawning areas.

However, as evidenced by several other recent successful fish passage projects, the removal of dams is not always necessary to restore fisheries runs. For example, the FWS worked with the Philadelphia Electric Power Company on the Susquehanna River to modify

dams to allow migration of American shad and blueback herring. The subsequent runs have surpassed biologists’ expectations and re-established important natural resources and important recreation and commercial resources.

About 550 dams (out of some 2,000 privately owned hydro-electric dams nationwide) will come up for FERC licensing renewal of 30 to 50 year licenses in the next 15 years. The FWS makes recommendations on these licenses to FERC and to meet these additional renewals, the budget includes an increase of \$0.9 million for the FWS to hire additional biologists and hydrological engineers to proactively engage the hydropower industry to develop innovative solutions which allow both fish passage and sensible use of the Nation’s hydropower. To support this FERC work, the budget also includes an increase of \$0.9 million for FWS to implement fish passage restoration projects such as Merrimack River downstream passage for Atlantic salmon. The goal of these projects is the opportunity to keep species off the threatened and endangered lists.

**INTERIOR COLUMBIA BASIN ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT PLAN**



The Department will begin implementation of the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Plan in 1999 in cooperation with the Department of Agriculture's U.S. Forest Service. The public comment period on the project has been extended to April 1998 to analyze economic and social conditions in the planning area and to allow reasonable time for interested parties to review and comment on this additional economic information. The additional funding the Department is requesting will be needed to implement whichever final alternative is adopted when the Record of Decision is finalized.

*The following are selected annual performance goals from Interior Bureau performance plans supported by the initiative to protect species and habitat:*

FWS 1999 goal: By September 30, 1999, FWS will increase by 100 percent the number of acres of habitat included in Habitat Conservation Plans (HCP) over the 1996 level.

FWS 1999 goal: By September 30, 1999, the National Wildlife Refuge System's funding increases will enable the protection, restoration and enhancement of an additional 661,000 acres of important fish and wildlife habitats on FWS lands over the 1997 baseline.

FWS 1999 goal: By September 30, 1999, FWS will improve the population status of 60 percent of the endangered species to the stable or improved category.

BIA 1999 goal: In 1999, BIA will protect 180,000 acres of northern spotted owl habitat and complete 30 marbled murrelet surveys on proposed or ongoing timber management areas.

USGS 1999 goal: In 1999, USGS will work with partners and collaborators from other agencies in selected ecosystems to (1) begin development of scientific information on the impacts of environmental factors on species mortality in the Salton Sea in response to priorities for species management, and (2) broaden pilot studies in other selected ecosystems to accelerate the development of decision support systems and related scientific information for habitat conservation planning.

At the "Forest Summit" of April 1993, the President pledged his support for the restoration of ecosystems and communities throughout the Pacific Northwest. The President's Forest Plan grew out of this promise. The Interior Columbia Basin Plan maintains and builds on that promise for the health of Federal lands and the economic vitality of those communities in the Columbia River Basin, upper Klamath Basin, and northern Great Basin that lie east of the Cascade range.

At the Forest conference, the President tasked the land managing agencies with developing a "scientifically

sound and ecosystem-based management strategy" for eastside Federal lands. In 1997, the lead agencies (the U.S. Forest Service and the BLM) released two parallel, draft environmental impact statements and preferred management alternatives for public land within the 144 million acre project area. Following a period of public comment and associated plan revision, the land managers expect to put into practice strategies that will restore long-term ecological integrity in the seven-state project area.

The BLM requests an additional \$6.8 million for projects in the area covered by the Plan that will support: implementation of integrated weed management plans on 38,000 acres; forest health initiatives on another 2,000 acres; fish and wildlife habitat restoration projects; threatened and endangered species habitat management prescriptions for twelve or more species of endangered fish; watershed analysis on an additional 500,000 acres; road condition risk inventories on 1,200 miles of roads; and use of prescribed fire to help restore 24,000 acres of rangeland and 280 acres of forest land. Of this funding increase, \$3.0 million will be transferred from funding for Jobs in-the-Woods projects now funded in the Oregon & California Grant Lands account. Based on the Jobs-in-the-Woods model of support for timber-dependent communities, much of this funding will be directed specifically at local community involvement through contract work that focuses on ecosystem restoration.

As a complement to this strategy, the FWS is requesting an additional \$1.5 million (included in the ESA increases discussed above) to conduct Endangered Species Act Section 7 consultations with the BLM and USFS, as those agencies implement land management prescriptions. The Plan provides for streamlined consultation and enhanced interagency staff relationships for Section 7 consultations. Further, the Plan is designed so that no species would need to be listed under the ESA because of Federal management actions within the Project area.

## **SOUTHWEST CONSERVATION STRATEGY**

The Department is committed to restore riparian conditions in the desert Southwest and to alleviate emerging wildlife and development issues surrounding species such as the southwestern willow flycatcher, cactus ferruginous pygmy owl, spikedeace, and loach minnow. BLM requests an additional \$0.8 million for riparian habitat improvement projects in New Mexico and Arizona. These projects will be implemented in

conjunction with the U.S. Forest Service to help bring southwest ecosystems to desired conditions, and thus reduce the likelihood of additional ESA listings in the area. The endangered species, fisheries, and migratory bird increases for the FWS described above include \$3.0 million for a multi-disciplinary effort to resolve conflicts over the use of natural resources.

## **BLM RANGELAND IMPROVEMENTS**

The BLM requests an increase of \$3.5 million for rangeland management improvements and an additional \$2.8 million for improvements to management of wild horses and burros on the public lands. The range funding will be used to implement recommendations contained in standards and guidelines promulgated by the Resource Advisory Councils, including conducting ecological site inventories. It will also be used to incorporate the standards and guidelines into land use and activity plans, associated adjustments to grazing prescriptions and on-the-ground land treatments, as well as for integrated weed management. The funding for the wild horse and burro program will be used to implement internal and Office of Inspector General recommendations on how best to provide for appropriate management levels of animal populations, veterinary care within BLM facilities, and heightened compliance within the adoption program.

## **PRESCRIBED FIRE**

The Department requests an additional \$14.4 million in the Wildland Fire Management account for program operations, including the fuels treatment program, to support expansion of the fuels management initiative proposed in 1998. For the Departments of the Interior



and Agriculture, 1999 will mark the second year of a significantly expanded fuels management/prescribed fire program. Forest thinning and fire treatments further the Administration's priority on protecting the environment by improving ecosystem health. At the same time, this program provides for public health and safety by reducing vegetative fuel loads that have led, in recent years, to the catastrophic fires the President noted at his address at the 1997 Lake Tahoe conference. Under optimal weather and other fire prescription conditions, the Department expects to treat more than 900,000 acres in 1999.

## **USGS SPECIES AND HABITAT RESEARCH**

The USGS proposes a program increase of \$11.0 million (\$9.0 million in biological research and monitoring; \$2.0 million in Earth Surface Dynamics program) for enhanced species and habitat research. The increase will fund the development of information, decision support systems (e.g., GIS) and other tools to assist Department land and resource managers in their efforts related to species and habitat restoration. The major efforts will be focused on landscape scale science, habitat restoration techniques and monitoring and assessment in support of adaptive resource management. Geographic areas will be targeted that have unique habitat characteristics that are at risk due to observed habitat loss or degradation.

## **PUERTO RICO CONSERVATION TRUST**

The President's Budget also includes a tax proposal to help the Puerto Rico Conservation Trust continue its mission of environmental protection and natural resource conservation in Puerto Rico. The Conservation Trust purchases ecologically important land that is threatened by development and other forces, conducts reforestation, and operates an environmental education program.

The Trust Fund has depended on revenue derived from Section 936 of the Internal Revenue Code to do much of its work. However, this tax provision will expire in 1998. To replace this lost revenue for the Trust, the President proposes the elimination of the limitation on the cover over of Federal excise taxes on rum paid to the Government of Puerto Rico, together with a five-year program that would set aside for the Trust 50 cents per proof gallon of these taxes.